



Empirical Articles

Religious and Political Conservatism and Beliefs About Same-Sex Parenting in Portugal

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Abstract

Aim: During the last decade, there have been political changes regarding the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) individuals in Portugal, such as the right to marry. However, parenting by same-sex couples is not legally allowed. The purpose of this study was to assess Portuguese heterosexuals' beliefs about same-sex parenting, and the role of religious and political conservatism in shaping these beliefs.

Method: A total of 993 participants, aged between 18 and 69 years ($M = 34$; $SD = 11$), responded to one of three questionnaires that included a case vignette depicting a different-sex, a female same-sex, or a male same-sex couple wishing to adopt a child. Participants were then asked to evaluate whether the couple would be suitable to adopt a child, and whether they anticipated any social and emotional problems with the child.

Results: Participants consistently anticipated more children's social and emotional problems if they were adopted by a same-sex couple. Men evaluated same-sex couples less favourably than women, and even less so the male same-sex couple.

Conclusion: It was found that both religious conservatism and right-wing political leaning were associated with more sexual prejudicial beliefs regarding same-sex couples.

Keywords: same-sex parenting, same-sex couples, adoption, sexual prejudice, religious beliefs, political conservatism

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Introduction

According to the American Census, in 2010 it was estimated that over 125,000 same-sex couples were raising over 220,000 children under the age of 18 (Gates, 2013a). The number of self-identified lesbians and gay men raising children has been growing exponentially. In 1994 it was estimated that one in five lesbians, and one in nine gay men had children, while in 2007 these numbers have changed to one in three lesbians, and one in six gay men (Bryant & Demian, 1994; Gates, 2013b). In fact, gay men, lesbians, and bisexual men and women have always been parents, although in the last three decades there has been a phenomenon, labelled as *lesbian and gay baby boom*, consisting of an increase of gay and lesbian planned families namely through artificial insemination, adoption, and surrogacy.

This phenomenon, which was more substantial in the United States, can also be seen today in several European countries. According to a recent European report, only eight European Union member states allow adoption to same-sex couples: Spain, the United Kingdom, Iceland, Belgium, Norway, Denmark, Sweden, and the Netherlands. In addition, although in Finland and Germany same-sex couples are not allowed to adopt, co-adoption rights are extended to the non-legal parent ([Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011](#)), and Austria will soon follow after the European Court of Human Rights ruling that denying co-adoption rights to same-sex couples was discriminatory (application 19010/07). France has recently become the ninth member state to allow same-sex marriage and adoption ([The Associated Press, 2013](#)). Other forms of parenting, in particular assisted reproductive technologies, are available to lesbian couples and single lesbian women in Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Iceland, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom ([Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011](#)).

In Portugal, it is estimated that the majority of gay, lesbian, and bisexual parents have had children in previous heterosexual relationships, similarly to what happens in other countries where it is not legally possible for gay men and lesbians to become parents, namely Italy ([Lelleri, Prati, & Pietrantonio, 2008](#)), or in countries where this possibility is still recent as in Spain ([González & López, 2009](#)). Portuguese community studies estimated that about 3% of single gay, lesbian and bisexual individuals, and between 8% and 10% of same-sex couples have children. Planned children in lesbian couples were in most cases conceived through artificial insemination at home with private sperm donation, and in gay couples most children were adopted by one of the “single” fathers ([Costa, Pereira, & Leal, 2013](#)).

Same-sex couples were given the right to civil partnerships in 2001 (Law 7/2001), and almost 10 years later, in 2010, to civil marriages (Law 9/2010). Although same-sex parenting rights were discussed throughout the process of debating and approving these laws, both laws explicitly precluded same-sex couples from adopting or from accessing assisted reproductive technologies. Despite overwhelming evidence showing that there are no differences between children raised in same-sex and different-sex families in crucial developmental areas, nor between same-sex and different-sex parents’ competences (see, for example, [Anderssen, Amlie, & Ytteroy, 2002](#); [Bos, van Balen, & van den Boom, 2004, 2007](#); [Crowl, Ahn, & Baker, 2008](#)), the question of why heterosexual individuals hold the belief that having same-sex parents, or a gay or lesbian parent is so detrimental for children arises.

Beliefs about same-sex parenting are for the most part rooted in negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians. Literature has revealed that negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians are common and widespread in Western societies ([Kite & Whitley, 1996](#)), which are conceptualized as sexual stigma, that is, negative regard and inferior status attributed to non-heterosexual behaviours, relationships, and individuals ([Herek, 2009](#)). Sexual prejudice is the adoption of sexual stigma that results in the negative attitudes and beliefs about sexual minorities ([Herek, 2009](#)). It has been shown that highly sexual prejudicial individuals are more likely to hold sexist attitudes and traditional gender beliefs, to be religious, and to be politically conservative ([Brown & Henriquez, 2008](#); [Davies, 2004](#); [Herek, 2000a](#); [Nagoshi et al., 2008](#)). Moreover, it has also been shown that men tend to hold more negative perceptions of gay men and lesbians than women, and that these are stronger toward gay men than toward lesbians ([Costa & Davies, 2012](#); [Herek, 2000b](#); [Kite & Whitley, 1996](#)).

To date, far less research has looked into heterosexuals’ attitudes toward same-sex parenting than toward gay men and lesbians. These attitudes seem to be largely based on attitudes toward gay men and lesbians, insofar as people who are stigmatized and judged to be morally inferior to their heterosexual counterparts are not expected to be capable of parenting well-adjusted children ([Clarke, 2001](#)). Research about attitudes toward gay- and lesbian-

parented families among psychosocial professionals and future professionals has reported low levels of knowledge about homosexuality and gay and lesbian families, and little contact with gay and lesbian families (Bliss & Harris, 1999; Maney & Cain, 1997). Moreover, even when attitudes were somewhat more accepting of same-sex families, individuals remained concerned about the level of support and acceptance of these families, and had fears that children would be victimized or harassed at school for having two same-sex parents (Bliss & Harris, 1999; Crawford, McLeod, Zamboni, & Jordan, 1999; King & Black, 1999).

Another body of work has revealed that participants would be more reluctant to give custody of a child to a same-sex couple, particularly to a male same-sex couple, than to a different-sex couple (Crawford & Solliday, 1996; Fraser, Fish, & MacKenzie, 1995), despite evidence of a significant change in heterosexuals' perceptions of gay and lesbian families, at least in the United States and Australia (Averett & Hegde, 2012; Camilleri & Ryan, 2006; Choi, Thul, Berenhaut, Suerken, & Norris, 2006). More favourable attitudes were held by women, younger and less religious individuals, by individuals with frequent interpersonal contact with gay men and lesbians, and by individuals who believed that homosexuality is innate (Choi et al., 2006; Crawford et al., 1999; Frias-Navarro, Monterde-i-Bort, Pascual-Soler, & Badenes-Ribera, 2013; Maney & Cain, 1997; Rye & Meaney, 2010).

The few Portuguese studies available found a similar pattern of attitudes, although it seems that Portuguese university students may have more negative beliefs about same-sex families than Australian or North-American students (Costa et al., in press; Gato, Fontaine, & Carneiro, 2010; Xavier, Mendes, Martins, & Fernandes, 2011). It is suggested that the situation in Portugal is not very different from that of the rest of Europe, and, with the exception of a Norwegian study reporting a majority of people who were supportive of same-sex marriage but not of same-sex parented-families (Hollekim, Slaatten, & Anderssen, 2012), little is known about the views and beliefs of European heterosexuals toward same-sex parenting. Two studies that have compared attitudes toward several homosexuality-related issues among European Union member-states showed that Portuguese heterosexual individuals scored the highest on levels of sexual prejudice alongside former communist countries, in particular toward gay and lesbian families (Lottes & Alkula, 2011; Takács & Szalma, 2011, 2013).

The main purpose of this study was to contribute to the understudied field of beliefs about same-sex parenting, by assessing how heterosexual individuals evaluate same-sex and different-sex couples in a hypothetical adoption scenario, and exploring whether sex and religious and political conservatism may explain sexual prejudicial beliefs about same-sex parenting.

Method

Participants

Participants were 993 Portuguese self-identified heterosexuals (27% men and 73% women), aged between 18 and 69 years ($M = 34$, $SD = 11$). The majority of the participants were single (55%), 29% were married, 9% were in civil partnerships, 7% were divorced, and 67% had no children. Most participants were highly qualified, 43% had a bachelor degree, and 43% had a master or doctorate degree. Although all Portuguese districts were represented, including the two archipelagos, over 50% of the participants were from the most populated cities (Lisboa: 36%, Porto: 10%, and Setúbal: 6%). The number of participants on each version of the questionnaire was similar: 333 participants responded to the different-sex couple scenario, 359 to the female same-sex couple scenario, and 301 to the male same-sex scenario.

When asked about their religious beliefs, about half of the sample identified as Catholic, 11% as Spiritual but not religious, and 31% as Atheists. Regarding political ideology, participants were asked which political party best represented their beliefs. Using both the Portuguese and the European parties framework, 6% identified with CDS-PP, 13% with PSD (both parties belonging to the same European People's Party), 14% with PS (European Socialist Party), 5% with CDU (European Communist Party), 11% with BE (European Left Party), 5% with other smaller parties, and almost half with none. In a right-wing – left-wing spectrum, CDS is a right-wing party, followed by PSD in the centre-right, PS in the centre-left, CDU in the left-wing, and followed by BE in the left spectrum as well¹. Comparing to national statistics, the sample was slightly skewed both in terms of political affiliation and in religious beliefs. There was a slight overrepresentation of left-wing participants, and a slight underrepresentation of Catholic participants (Instituto Nacional de Estatística, 2002).

Measures

Besides a socio-demographic questionnaire, participants were presented with one of three scenarios describing a couple wishing to adopt a child. Using a quasi-experimental research design, each participant only responded to one of three scenarios (a different-sex couple, a male same-sex couple, and a female same-sex couple). After reading the scenario, participants were asked to evaluate the potential quality of the depicted couple in three questions: a) “Do you believe that ‘Person A and Person B’ would be good parents?”, b) “Do you believe that if ‘Person A and Person B’ adopt, the child may be at risk of having emotional problems?”, and c) “Do you believe that if ‘Person A and Person B’ adopt, the child may be at risk of being teased or harassed at school by their peers?”. Participants were asked to respond in a 4-point Likert scale (*certainly not*, *probably not*, *probably yes*, *certainly yes*).

The names of Person A and Person B were manipulated to represent a man and a woman, two men, or two women. The couples were described as having a long and stable relationship and a strong parenting desire, and enjoying financial and professional stability, and a good social support system. The baseline scenario was loosely based on the work of Camilleri and Ryan (2006), and developed for this study. Face validity was investigated through one focus group conducted by the first author with five other researchers in clinical and/or health psychology familiarized with parenting and family research. The final version of the scenario is presented in Appendix A.

Procedures

Participants were recruited online through posts on different social networks, forums, and discussion groups, and through advertisements on Google and on Facebook. Faculty and students from different universities were also contacted by the universities' mailing-lists, and asked to forward the invitation to participate in the study to other potential participants in order to increase sample size. Finally, family associations, religious and political organizations were also asked to invite their members to take part in this study.

The study was presented as a survey about beliefs about gay and lesbian parenting, and a brief description of the study and a link to the online questionnaire was provided on the original message. The questionnaires were completed online, and were hosted on Google Docs. On the first page of the online questionnaire, participants were informed of how to complete the questionnaire, how to withdraw from the study, and that the participation was voluntary and anonymous. Before advancing to the questionnaire itself, participants were asked to consent to participate. Participants were given three different links to a questionnaire, whose order was changed each week, and asked to select one of the links. The questionnaires were extensive, and included other attitude measures, taking an average of 20-30 minutes to be completed, which discouraged participants from filling-in

more than one questionnaire. However, after downloading the questionnaires into IBM SPSS v.20, the data was carefully scanned to detect duplicate questionnaires.

With the exception of the socio-demographic questionnaire, all questions were mandatory, and participants could only progress from one page to the other after responding to all questions. Only completed questionnaires were saved.

Results

Evaluation of the Adoptive Couples

While all the participants evaluated positively the different-sex couple, 27% responded that the female same-sex couple would certainly be good mothers, and 68% that they would probably be. In the case of the male same-sex couple, 27% of the participants responded that they would be good parents and 67% that they would probably be.

To explore whether there were differences in the evaluation of different-sex and same-sex couples, a one-way MANOVA was conducted with type of family as independent variable, and the three questions that followed the scenario as dependent variables. MANOVA test results revealed a significant effect of sex of couple (RLR = .887; $F(3, 988) = 292.57$; $p < .001$, $\eta^2_p = .470$), and three one-way ANOVAs were conducted to explore these differences further.

For Question 1, regarding parenting suitability, no differences were found, although it approached significance ($p = .055$). An inspection of the mean values obtained for each scenario showed the trend of a better evaluation of the different-sex couple scenario than of the same-sex couples' scenarios. However, significant differences were found for both Questions 2 and 3, and Tukey post-hoc tests were conducted to further explore these differences. Participants anticipated more emotional problems if children were adopted by a same-sex couple (either two men or two women) than by a different-sex couple. It was also found that participants were significantly more likely to be concerned that children would be teased by their peers if adopted by a female same-sex couple, and even more so if adopted by a male same-sex couple, in comparison to those adopted by a different-sex couple (Table 1).

Table 1

ANOVA Test Results for the Evaluations of Different-Sex and Same-Sex Couples

	Type of couple						F(2,992)	p
	Different-sex		Female same-sex		Male same-sex			
	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)	n	M (SD)		
Parenting ability	333	1.89 (.328)	359	1.80 (.594)	301	1.81 (.602)	2.916	.055
Child emotional problems	333	1.92 (.442)	359	2.14 (.792)	301	2.17 (.820)	12.464	<.001
Child social problems	333	1.79 (.526)	359	2.81 (.601)	301	2.93 (.631)	377.550	<.001

Considering the effect of sex found, two two-way ANOVAs were conducted, contrasting sex of participant and sex of target in the anticipation of children's developmental problems (Questions 2 and 3). For Question 2, a sex of participant effect was found, suggesting that males anticipated significantly more emotional problems for children adopted by same-sex couple than by a different-sex couple, but no sex of target effect was found.

For Question 3, both sex of participant and sex of target effects were found, but no significant interaction. These results showed that (1) male participants anticipated more social problems for children adopted by same-sex couples, and that (2) significantly more social problems were anticipated for children adopted by a male same-sex couple than by a female same-sex couple (Table 2).

Table 2

Sex of Same-Sex Couple x Sex of Participant ANOVA for Children Social and Emotional Problems

	Question 2: Emotional problems		Question 3: Social problems	
	<i>F</i> (1,660)	<i>p</i>	<i>F</i> (1,660)	<i>p</i>
(A) Sex of same-sex couple	.013	.908	4.160	<.05
(B) Sex of participant	30.546	<.001	5.234	<.05
(A) x (B) interaction	.014	.906	.027	.870

Religious and Political Effects on the Evaluation of the Adoptive Couples

Considering that the results were somewhat different depending on the sex of the couples evaluated, the effects of religious beliefs and political affiliation were explored separately for each version of the questionnaire. In order to explore whether there were religious and political effects on the evaluation of the adoptive couples, three two-way MANOVAs were conducted with religion and political affiliation as independent variables, and the three questions that followed the scenario as dependent variables. Religion and political effects were assessed together considering a frequently reported association between religiosity and political conservatism. Due to the low number of people on some of the religious categories, only three groups (Catholic, Atheists, and Spirituals) were in sufficient number to be compared. In regards to political ideology, only participants who identified with one of the five political parties represented in the Portuguese Parliament were included in the analysis.

For Version 1, different-sex couple, MANOVA test results revealed a religion effect ($R^2 = .026$, $F(3, 312) = 2.719$; $p = .045$, $\eta^2_p = .025$) and a political effect ($R^2 = .048$, $F(5, 312) = 3.011$; $p = .011$, $\eta^2_p = .046$) but no significant interaction. To explore these differences further, one-way ANOVAs on individual religious and political effects were conducted. Not surprisingly, no significant results were found considering that participants were evaluating a different-sex couple.

For Version 2, female same-sex couple, MANOVA test results revealed a significant political effect ($R^2 = .036$, $F(5, 338) = 2.401$; $p = .037$, $\eta^2_p = .034$), but no religious or interaction effects. To explore these differences further, one-way ANOVAs on individual political effects were conducted. Significant results were found for Question 1, parental suitability ($F(5, 358) = 4.115$; $p = .001$), and for Question 2, child's emotional problems ($F(5, 358) = 2.424$; $p = .035$). Tukey post-hoc tests revealed significant differences between CDS participants and all other political parties when evaluating parental suitability (all p 's < .01), which suggests that CDS participants held more stigmatizing beliefs of lesbian couples as parents than participants from other political parties. When evaluating child's emotional problems, significant differences were found between CDS and BE participants (on opposite sides of the right-wing – left-wing spectrum; $p = .021$), which suggests that participants affiliated with a right-wing party anticipated more emotional problems for children adopted by a lesbian couple than left-wing participants.

Lastly, for Version 3, male same-sex couple, MANOVA test results revealed religious ($R^2 = .046$, $F(3, 279) = 4.303$; $p = .005$, $\eta^2_p = .044$) and political effects ($R^2 = .079$, $F(5, 279) = 4.390$; $p = .001$, $\eta^2_p = .073$) but no sig-

nificant interaction. To explore these differences further, one-way ANOVAs were conducted, and subsequent Tukey post-hoc tests where appropriate.

ANOVA test results with religion as independent variable were significant for all three questions; Question 1, parental suitability ($F(3, 300) = 4.510$; $p = .004$), Question 2, child's emotional problems ($F(3, 300) = 8.412$; $p < .001$), and Question 3, child's social problems ($F(3, 300) = 3.023$; $p = .030$). For Question 1, significant differences were found between catholic and spiritual participants ($p = .002$). For Question 2, significant differences were found between catholic and spiritual participants ($p = .001$), and between catholic and atheist participants ($p < .001$). For Question 3, although ANOVA test results was significant, post-hoc results approached but did not reach significance. Taken together, this group of results suggest that religious participants tended to stigmatize lesbian-parented families significantly more than non-religious participants.

ANOVA test results with political affiliation as independent variable were significant for all three questions; Question 1, parental suitability ($F(5, 300) = 2.742$; $p = .019$), Question 2, child's emotional problems ($F(5, 300) = 7.713$; $p < .001$), and Question 3, child's social problems ($F(5, 300) = 3.359$; $p = .006$). For Question 1, significant differences were found between CDS and BE participants ($p = .014$); for Question 2, significant differences were found between CDS and PS participants, CDS and CDU participants, and CDS and BE participants (all p 's $< .01$), and between PSD and PS participants, PSD and CDU participants, and PSD and BE participants (all p 's $< .01$). Taken together, these differences illustrate the trend of significantly higher levels of anticipated emotional problems for children adopted by a gay couple among participants with a centre-right and right-wing political leaning. For Question 3, significant differences were found between PSD and PS participants, PSD and CDU participants, and PSD and BE participants (all p 's $< .05$), which reaffirms the previous trend of higher levels of anticipation of social problems for children adopted by a gay couples among right-wing participants.

Discussion

The results of the present study confirm the existence of differences in the evaluation of same-sex and different-sex couples by heterosexual individuals. Although participants did not have a significantly more negative perception of the quality of parenting by two men or two women when comparing with a different-sex couple, the results approached significance. With a more gender-balanced sample, it is likely that these differences would be significant, considering that men were underrepresented in this study.

Significant differences were found for the anticipation of social and emotional problems for children raised by same-sex couples. Heterosexual individuals evaluated both gay- and lesbian-parented families as posing significantly more difficulties to their children than heterosexual-parented families, which is in line with previous research on the perceptions of gay and lesbian parenting (Bliss & Harris, 1999; McLeod, Crawford, & Zechmeister, 1999). Interestingly, participants only distinguished between male and female same-sex couples when asked to evaluate the likelihood of children being victimized by their peers, in which male same-sex couples were perceived as posing more risks to the child. This difference may be explained by the general perception that gay men usually suffer more prejudice and discrimination than lesbians do (Herek, 2000b). On the other hand, women, even if lesbians, may be regarded as being more competent to raise children than men, in which the competences associated with maternity would mitigate the effects of victimization for the children.

In line with research suggesting that men tend to hold more negative attitudes toward gay men and lesbians (Costa & Davies, 2012; Kite & Whitley, 1996), in this study men anticipated more emotional and social problems

for children adopted by a same-sex couple. Furthermore, men anticipated more emotional difficulties for children raised by gay couples than by lesbian couples, as also reported by [Maney and Cain \(1997\)](#).

According to the sexual stigma theory, sexual prejudicial beliefs about gay men and lesbians and about same-sex parented families are not only held by individuals in differing degrees, but also by society's institutions that may shape and reinforce such beliefs ([Herek, 2009](#)). Many religious and political institutions often convey negative messages about same-sex parenting, arguing that gay men and lesbians raising children is pervasive for children's development. The results from the present study suggest that self-identified catholic participants held significantly more negative beliefs about gay couples, and about how children would fare poorer if raised by gay couples, than did non-religious participants.

However, political institutions seemed to have a stronger impact on participants' beliefs than religious institutions. Right-wing participants were more prejudicial towards both gay and lesbian couples as parents, and anticipated more emotional and social difficulties for children in both types of families, than left-wing participants. The fact that no significant differences were found in the evaluation of the different-sex couple suggests that there was no effect of beliefs that adoption per se could pose difficulties for couples and/or their adopted children.

Social conservatism, measured indirectly as affiliation with Catholicism and right-wing political leaning, was shown to be an important variable in explaining sexual prejudice. However, these results seem to suggest that political institutions may have a stronger impact on individuals' internalization of a system of negative beliefs and values about gay- and lesbian-parented families than religious institutions. It is important to note that although institutions may convey these negative messages that are internalized by individuals, people can challenge them from inside the institutions, or by participating in the policy process ([Herek, 2009](#)).

It is noteworthy that regardless of how participants evaluated the suitability of same-sex couples as parents, most of them expressed the concern that children in gay and lesbian families would be more victimized in school. In fact, the mean value for both men and women was three, which represents that participants believed that children would probably be teased and/or harassed by their peers. Not only is this belief a common concern (see, for example, [Clarke, 2001](#)), but it has also important implications in the sense that it implies that gay and lesbian families may face additional difficulties in their integration in different social contexts, particularly in schools. This concern should call the attention of professionals to develop programs to identify and to deal with homophobic bullying and harassment in schools so to ensure that children of gay and lesbian families have a good social and psychological adjustment. One important fashion to pursue the development of these programs is to promote an open dialogue about not only the different sexual orientations and identities, but particularly about the relational dimensions of gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals, and their family configurations.

In contrast, research about gay- and lesbian-headed families does not confirm the existence of motives to justify concerns over children's development in these families ([Anderssen et al., 2002](#); [Patterson, 2006](#); [Tasker, 2005](#)). Policy statements from the American Psychological Association, the American Academy of Pediatrics, and recently from the Portuguese Psychological Association state that the development of children and adolescents is similar in same-sex and different-sex families ([Ordem dos Psicólogos, 2013](#); [Paige, 2005](#); [Perrin & Committee on Psychosocial Aspects of Child and Family Health, 2002](#)).

Furthermore, a technical report produced by the European Council about the rights of children concluded that the well-being of children depends not so much on the family configuration, but more so on the legal protection that

they enjoy. It is further stated that the biggest threat to the well-being and stability of the children is the discrimination of which they are victims in European states that do not legitimate their families (Lowe, 2009). However, there are only a few European countries that extend the same rights and protection to same-sex families, and the attitudes of European individuals in relation to the quality of parenting by gay, lesbian, and bisexual individuals are still predominantly negative. In Portugal, 81% of people did not accept that same-sex couple should be allowed to adopt a child in equal circumstances to different-sex couples, and 71% disagreed that civil marriage should be allowed to same-sex couples (Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011).

Although the results reported here showed similar trends to those reported in the international literature, there are some limitations to acknowledge. First, the sample does not seem to faithfully represent the attitudes of the general population, when comparing the prevalence of negative beliefs about same-sex parenting to the statistics found in the European reports, and this calls for attention in the generalizability of the results. The majority of the participants were single, with no children, highly qualified, and women. These characteristics may have influenced the results, and skewed the sample in favour of more acceptant attitudes. Online surveys are known to have this effect, and future studies should endeavour to replicate these findings with a more balanced sample.

Another important limitation regards the percentage of participants that identified with a political party. Political affiliation was measured by asking participants about the political party that best represented their ideals and beliefs, and a significant number of participants did not identify with any. Although this approach to measure political affiliation had this limitation, it allowed for comparisons both in terms of the Portuguese political scene and across European political parties' families that has important implications for understanding the role of the different political institutions on individuals' prejudicial beliefs. Future studies should consider measuring both political leaning as party affiliation and as a continuous variable in a right-wing – left-wing spectrum.

In conclusion, this was one of the few studies about the heterosexual individuals' beliefs about same-sex parenting, particularly in Portugal. Given the recent legislative and social changes across the Western World in regards to the rights of LGBT individuals, the right to marry and to have a family is still under a lot of controversy, and although research has shown that there are no motives to deny same-sex couples the right to be parents, there are still concerns about the quality of parenting by same-sex couples and the potential effects of having two fathers or two mothers on children's development. The study of the role of social conservatism on the stigmatization of same-sex families is highly necessary in order to develop programs specific to inform people about gay and lesbian relationships, and about gay and lesbian families that may instigate individuals to confront the negative and prejudicial messages conveyed by individuals and institutions.

Notes

i) CDS stands for *Centro Democrático Social*, commonly referred to as *Partido Popular*; PSD stands for *Partido Social Democrata*; PS stands for *Partido Socialista*; CDU stands for *Coligação Democrática Unitária*, and it is a coalition of two left-wing parties, the Communist Party (PCP) and the Ecologist Party (PEV); BE stands for *Bloco de Esquerda*, and it is a coalition of five left-wing political forces.

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Appendix: Case Vignette (Scenario) Depicting the Male Same-Sex Couple

"John and Will have been a couple for 10 years, committed to each other and happy. However, they have a strong desire to be parents, and because they can't have children they decided to adopt. John and Will both have a university degree, are professionally successful, and are beloved by their families and friends. Both their parents are very excited with the idea of becoming grandparents, and are available to help them in whatever they need to welcome the child into the family. John and Will have a two-bedroom apartment in the same city where they work. Their friends and colleagues describe them as calm, available and attentive persons, believing that they both possess the qualities needed to be good parents. They have some child-caring experience, especially with John's nephews. After a lot of thought about this, they initiated the adoption process and are going to the meeting with the adoption worker. They are very excited to fulfil their desire to be parents. They are waiting to be accepted as candidates to adopt a child."